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RED ROOFS:

AND OTHER POEMS



RED ROOFS;

AND OTHER POEMS.

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RED ROOFS:

AND OTHER POEMS.

BY

GEORGE T. COSTER,

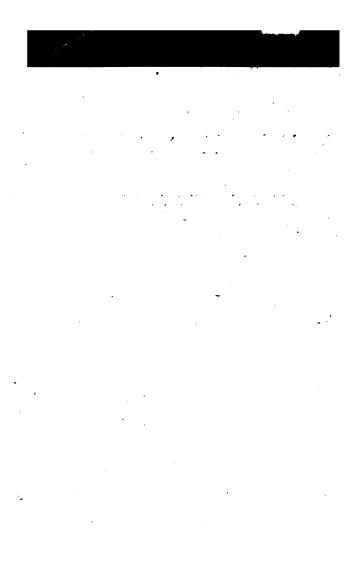
AUTHOR OF ' POEMS AND HYMNS,' ETC.

LONDON:

ELLIOT STOCK, 62, PATERNOSTER ROW, E.C.

1886.

ANSUSCH



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TO MY WHITBY FRIENDS, THESE.

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RED ROOFS.

RED roofs across the river! ere the gloom Creeps o'er the glory of the drooping day, Ye blaze with rubies, and with roses bloom; Then fades your beauty into dusk away.

What generations of admiring eyes

Have gazed, then, death-dimmed, ceased on you to
gaze!

But still responsive to the sunset skies, Ye bloom with roses, and with rubies blaze.

Old town, and quaint, say who it was that planned Your narrow lanes, and stairway alleys high, That climb the cliff, and built you round the strand, As if to hear the river whispering by.

I see the centuries moving through your streets—Slow serfs, proud lords, black jetters, fishers brown, And, back from northern blasts and tropic heats, The welcomed sailor in his bluff renown.

RED ROOFS.

I see your whalers of a modern day
By the staith anchored from the enriching deep;
I see the press-gang rushing on its prey,
Glad to clutch men, though wives and mothers weep.

Unchronicled, beneath those roofs of red, How many a life has passed!—the lowly birth, Youth, manhood, years of labour, age, then 'dead' The whispered news, and earth consigned to earth.

There Poverty has walked the way of light, And silent Sorrow shed submissive tear; There Shame has shrunk into its loveless night, And mad Crime plunged to death without a fear.

At yonder doors what greetings and adieus, What frighted faces at the storm-beat pane; What hearts that trembled at bereaving news Of loved ones gone that ne'er should come again!

There we behold ourselves, as well as those Whose lives were ended long ago on earth; Our sorrows weeping in those ancient woes, Our mirth rejoicing in that ancient mirth.

For man remains, however men depart, Through changing Time for evermore the same: There throbs in all mankind one human heart; All kindred are in glory or in shame.

10

From age to age, in court, and camp, and street, Beneath the red-tiled roof or roof of gold, Men at their noblest only men repeat, And man the recent is the man of old.

THE CHURCH STEPS.

Two centuries of steps, and then
A field of graves!
With many a sculptured tale of men
Lost in the wayes.

You climb and climb, with here and there
A seat for breath,
To find amid the loftier air
A realm of death.

And thus it is with human life
Men toil to rise,

And lo! above the strain and strife

A graveyard lies.

Two centuries of steps, and then
Amid the graves,
A holy house that tells to men
Of Him that saves.

O weary men, and women worn,

That there have found,

And find, bright hints of heavenly morn,

On earthly ground!

And so atop the steps of Time,

If climbed aright,

Heaven's glad and everlasting chime

And home of light.

WHITBY ABBEY.

O RUIN grey! thou stand'st where stood the house That royal Hilda led—where Caedmon sung— And holy men and women paid their vows In the old Saxon tongue.

Thou'rt grey with ages, and yet recent thou

To that fair house reared in the Pagan days,
Ere England had to Odin ceased to bow,

And learned the Christ to praise.

'Tis little we can tell of what shall be:

The building oft survives the builder's name;

Her house has past, but still remembered she,

Crowned with unwithering fame.

Hilda, a queen of wisdom! clear and strong Of mind, to guide the leaders of the land From out the baffling maze of grief and wrong, As by an angel's hand. A sacred school she ruled, on yonder height, Of saintly courage, consecrated lore, Of lives that followed, clad in robes of white, The Christ that we adore.

A College whence into the heathen gloom
Went holy John of Beverley; and glad,
A bright, far-travelling lamp of truth to illume
The darkness, brave Saint Chad.

A grove of meditation, whence the bird Of English song at her wise bidding soared Into the silence, and afar were heard The pure lays Caedmon poured.

The holy house she reared, wood-built, thatch-crowned, Where is it? Only in the storied page;

And that which on its ruins rose is found

Now ruinous with age.

But she is unforgotten; her bright name
Is like a city set upon a hill:
Though envious Time has darkened much, her fame
Glows with the morning still.

What greatness but in goodness? All beside
That bears the name is fated to decay:
But Goodness to the Eternal One's allied,
And shares His endless day.

With each true song th

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THE BELL-BUOY: A SONG.

O FAITHFUL bell of the wave,
Ever in duty brave,
Day and night,
In tone of monition now
I hear thee speak, and thou
Art right.

Thou art not bell in the tower
Of church to chime the hour
Newly born:
Thou tell'st of peril to men,
Sea-hidden beyond their ken,—
To warn.

No sweet marriage-tidings float
Out of thine iron throat,
Solemn bell;
Never a clashing of glee—
No joy-bell thou at sea:
'Tis well.

Sailors, lest there they find
A tomb.

How many the ships unknown Saved by thy far-flung tone,
Faithful bell None among mortals below Ills prevented can know,
And tell!

THE FIGURE-HEAD.

SAY, Figure-head! what doest thou there In garden-ground? Is not thy place 'mid stormy air, The waves around?

For thou wast shaped with man-like form To sail the sea, And to the good ship, calm or storm, Bold head to be.

O couldst thou tell where thou hast been, What tales were thine! What realms of marvel thou hast seen Beyond the brine!—

Hast seen, if eyes of wood can see!
What tongues hast heard,
If wooden ears attent can be
To human word.

What dangers thou hast run! what doom
Escaped of wreck,
When panic spread in midnight gloom
From deck to deck!

But all is o'er: where went the ship, Of which a part In many an ocean thou didst dip With fearless heart?

How cam'st thou here, in garden-plot,
To rest at last?

Sky-gazing, hast thou all forgot
Thy wondrous past?

Do stars in ocean-depths of night Appear to thee As often once, with spark of light, Far ships at sea?

Thy wandering life is o'er, and now Thou art at rest; New-coated, too, in colour thou Art surely blest.

Not blest? What more canst thou desire?

Contented be!

In age 'tis folly to aspire

To sail the sea.

What better than in early strength
The deep to breast?
What better than in age at length
'Mong flowers to rest?

A CONTRACTOR OF THE PARTY

ON AN OLD CLERICAL PORTRAIT.

THERE from the past his semblance glows!
A comfortable cheek with rose
Fair-tinted, full observant eye,
Lips slow to give the reason why,
Strong chin, declarative how strong
The will could be in right or wrong.

Here by the sea he dwelt, and here
As pastor toiled through many a year,
Until life's evening grey was reached,
And Death, the mighty preacher, preached
The sermon which, whate'er the creed
Or no-creed, every man must heed.

From crumbling stone upon the height Unseen except by searching sight We know, and thence alone we know His sorrows in the long ago,—
There told in letters brief and dim The losses that came thick on him.

How did he bear himself when one By one his children went?—that son Plucked in his rosebud years from Time To blossom in a better clime? Then did his heart submission teach Beyond what sermon e'er could preach?

How went he in and out among
His flock? What thought of him the young?
Was he a sermon in the street
To every friend he chanced to meet?
That said—whate'er it failed to say—
'Tis good to walk with Christ to-day'?

Was he a man of deeds as well As words?—in which did he excel? How far in him were word and deed, As should be, happily agreed? Harmonious so that none could well Say either of them bore the bell?

What thought the widow in her woe
Of him a hundred years ago?
Shone he athrough the dark'ning night
Of death, to men, like heavenly light
That lit the spirit's lonely way,
Aud lured it onward into day?



25 ON AN OLD CLERICAL PORTRAIT.

A few brief facts alone survive
To keep his name on earth alive;
Yet here he dwelt and laboured long,
And fought against the current wrong,
And said his say for God, and then
Was seen no more of mortal men.

If not in chronicles below,
His record is on high, we know:
With that he well is satisfied
Here to have laboured, loved, and died:
Yet thanks, poor painter, that thy skill
Has left to us his semblance still.

HE COMES NO MORE.

A woman is a mother, though
Her children from the homestead go,—
And far beyond the wave,
Or 'neath it find a grave.

O mother, with the drooping head And raining eyes, they call him dead: But what is that to thee? Thy son he'll ever be.

She thinks she hears him at the door—
The darling that comes back no more,
His merry voice about
The house, with song and shout.

That cheek of rose, and eye of dove;
That arm of strength, and soul of love!
His going was the night:
His coming was the light.

28 IIE COMES NO MORE.

But now he comes no more—no more:
The ship ne'er reached the foreign shore:
Of all the many lives
Aboard, not one survives.

O tender love, that lit his face!
O ardour in the last embrace,
So little deemed the last,
When from the door he passed!

How came the end, and where? Ah me? The cruel, irresponsive sea,

Wherein her darling sleeps,

The secret closely keeps.

But, woman, though untold by stone Memorial, and to men unknown The spot where his dear breath Ended in stormy death,

Be sure One Eye marked all that passed, One Arm around thy child was cast, One Heart was there for thee, Upon that awful sea!

MISS JOHNSON.

MISS JOHNSON'S gone, sir! All day yesterday
I saw it was a fight 'tween her and death.
She had great spirit! To the very last
She kept about: would have no friend to stay,—
No watcher, no companion. When I saw
Death in her face, I took my stand, and said,
'Miss Johnson, you should not be left alone.'
I could not say the thing I wished to say.
She had no thought of death: could manage still!
But every now and then I came to see
How she was doing; built the fire; and saw
(I know the look of death) death in her face.

'You cannot leave me!' once she said; and I Answered: 'Miss Johnson, no, I am afrail. You should not be alone: I'll build the fire.' Her breath was very hard to get, yet still There she sat reading. But as night came on, I said: 'It is not right; it must not be; You shall not pass another night alone!'

That seemed to trouble her; but I was firm. The doctor saw her-I would have him called; And then he sent some medicine to relieve. But gave no hint of death. At nine came nurse. When it was just upon the stroke of ten, Miss Johnson put her books straight as you see, Looked round, then went upstairs to bed; but how-For I have done to her what must be done To all the dead—one so deformed as she Could ever climb the stairs I cannot tell. The nurse slept little; and at last sat up, And heard Miss Johnson talking as in sleep. Then in the silence a sharp whisper, 'Come!' Whether to angels spoken, or to nurse, I know not; but at once nurse by her stood, To find her speechless,—dying,—propped her head, Gave me the signal through the wall; but ere I came, though coming quickly, she was gone.

You'll look, sir, will you not, upon her face?
There's of her blood but one, and she not near—
A second cousin somewhere in the North—
Who will be here, the doctor says, to-night
By the last train.

How like herself she looks! Looks younger than she has these twenty years. She was a suffering woman; ne'er complained; Went in and out among us with a smile, Though you could see the pain upon her face. She loved her Bible and her Church, and now If she's not safe, I know not who will be.

THE BELLMAN.

Ir heard but once, you ne'er will lose The tone in which he tells the news,— Now whispering in deep-muttered bass, Then silver-shrilling through the place.

In momentary silence he Stands, so each passer-by may see That news which should be known is near, And claims the universal ear.

His clanging bell has power to rule To silence household tongue and tool, And the peremptory 'Notice!' loud, Puts pause upon the hurrying crowd.

He tells of trade,—of bargains great, That but the willing purse await: Of auction sale, where hammer's blow Shall let the casy treasures go. Of pleasant trips he tells, for those Fearless of undulatory woes: He names the steamer, hour, and fee, And tempts the landsmen out to sea.

He tells of losses, and would win The finder by reward from sin; And, preacher in his rugged way, Bids men be children of the day.

Long may he live the bell to clang!

Far distant be his mortal pang—

When all-commanding Death shall say,

'Time's over—put the bell away!'

THE FISHERMAN'S SONG.

'Tis well when the wind is fair
To sail like a bird away,
Away to the sea-line where
The fish in the deep sea play;
A better crew cannot be
Than those that sail out with me,
To earn their bread in the sea,—
My lads and I.

The lads are my own boys three,
I'd pit them against the fleet!
There cannot be out on the sea
Any three my three to beat,—
When heavy with fish the net,
And all good recompense get
To baffle the demon Debt,
My lads and I.

O joy as we homeward ride With a glittering glorious 'take' To hear from over the tide

The bells of the grey church break!

To see the old town come near

And nearer, to pass the pier,

And then, on the staith, our dear!

My lads and I.

Whatever the sea may give,
Or what from our nets withhold,
We yet are able to live,
Though seldom a 'last' be told:
We cannot be poor with love
In our cot; and peace, the dove,
In our heart; and God above—
My lads and I.

God bless them, my lads so dear,
God bless her, the fond wife true,
And hold her His heart a-near
When we're away on the blue!
Our darling! on her we dote;
For her we labour afloat;
We all are hers in the boat—
My lads and I.

A YEAR AGO.

No more that vivid glance, that glowing cheek,

Those words that breathed like roses from the soul!

That soul of beauty! it were vain to seek

For any fairer though from pole to pole.

'Tis hard to think we ne'er shall see her more,
The form of vigour and the eye of health,—
Through which the glad soul as through open door
Looked thought and love's unutterable wealth.

Death's sudden hand in Rome upon her fell, And so she passed a year this passing day, And in that passage words are poor to tell What sunshine faded from our hearts away.

Death called her, not unready: the true work Which human life ennobles and survives, She did,—nor ever idly sought to shirk, And thus her life wrote deep in living lives.

For others lived she; wrought as in the eye
Of the great Master, conscience in the task;
Her brief best gave, and when she came to die
No need had she for lengthened years to ask.

So early taken! But He takes away
Who makes this life a schooling for the next:
There His strange purposes are clear as day,
At which our clouded eyes are now perplexed.

She is not here; but could we only see

For one swift moment the transcendent bliss

That she inherits, we should long to be

In that fair world, and only pine in this.

Our dead we deem at distance, as if states
So widely different must be parted wide:

'Tis but a veil conceals the happy gates
Through which the heavenly Bridegroom leads the
Bride.

A veil—no more between the worlds of souls— No mighty mountain wearisome to climb, No awful ocean that with tempest rolls, A veil between eternity and time!

A veil, and she within and we without!

How much that is unknown we fain would know!

O wondrous moment that shall end all doubt,

And all be learnt she learnt a year ago!

April 14, 1884.

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MISCELLANEOUS.



ENOCH.

How many a father, when he takes his child,

His first-born, with its innocent helpless charms,
Into his loving unaccustomed arms,
Feels, as he never felt before, defiled,
Unworthy of such purity—exiled,
And self-exiled from the great Father! Some,
Led by the unconscious little one, have come
Home to that Father from the sinful wild,
Henceforth to be His glad obedient sons.
And was it thus with Enoch, when the road
Of sin familiar he determined shuns
To walk with God? High, pure the path he trod;
And after he begat—the record runs—
His first-born son, it was he walked with God.

TERAH IN HARAN.

- You wonder here to see me? Well, it is a story strange!
 - I thought to die where I was born, in Ur, the city fair,
- And where I lived two hundred years through many a chance and change;
 - And oft had said, 'My father's grave his son's dust too will bear.'
- In Ur I prospered, making gods of clay, wood, silver, gold;
 - Good symbols all of Him to Whom men clasp the hands and pray:
- An honourable toil it was, and paid me well—till old,
 - I, on a sudden, found myself, my black hair lost in grey.

- My name was blown abroad: they came from far and near to buy.
- Among the city elders, too, at last I took my seat:
- The young men all regarded me with reverential eye,
 - And honour from Ur's honoured men (that came to me) was sweet.
- Two hundred years—it seemed a day! I to my business kept.
 - Why not? The gold an old man earns is gold, whate'er they say.
- But on a sudden spoke The Voice to Abram as he slept:
 - It bade him—bade us all—from Ur to regions far away.
- I knew that he had heard The Voice that never can deceive,
 - That rules the stars divine above, and all the world below:
- I knew it from his look and tone, so ready was to leave
 - The city that I loved, and forth on pilgrimage to go.

- Ah, pilgrimage too long for me! I found two days enough.
 - I could not bear another day, for I am old and weak:
- I cannot do as others would, and cross the desert rough;
 - When I am gone, then Abram may his foreign country seek.
- If I were young!—but I am old: in Haran I remain.
 - I stand to that. I'll have my will, and no more further roam.
- And did he hear The Voice? 'Tis strange it ne'er has spoke again.
 - Old? Not so very. Perhaps this place, for long, may be my home.

ESAU AT THE CAVE OF MACHPELAH.

STRANGE, nevermore to see his face!
('Tis just a morning for the chase!)
Dead? No—I cannot think him dead.
I feel his hand upon my head
As when a boy beside his knee,
A-sharpening arrows as I stood
Against the birds in field and wood—
Hand ever, only, kind to me.

A boy, a man, at once I seem:
Oh! which am I? Are both a dream?

No dream—no dream, that he at last Has to the dreamless silence past! Here—was it only yesterday?— Him dead, among the dead to lay We came—a vast and solemn crowd, With lamentations long and loud, And not a louder voice than mine,

46 ESAU AT THE CAVE OF MACHPELAH.

And left him in this Cave to sleep
As long as yonder sun shall shine,
And goats upon the mountains leap.
O father—father, when I die,
'Tis by thy side I fain would lie.'

He father, mother, was in one,
And worthy of a better son.
It was his joy to hear me tell
How I had slain the fleet gazelle,
How spotted leopard, lion snared,
And hurled the spear that never spared,
And drew the bow that knew to smite
Swift creatures in their swiftest flight.
It was his joy my clothes to smell,
Sweet-scented from the fields, and eat
With happy haste my savoury meat,—
He had a palate, keen and wise.
No more! For ever closed his ear,
No more! Death's night is in his eyes,
He knows not that his Esau's near.

He meant for me the birthright—meant— Though baffled by the base event.

'Twas little, little that I lost, The sting of it was being crost,— Outwitted by a kinsman,—one Who was my father's, mother's son. Poor crafty Jacob! Always craft!

He made a mystery where was none;

He lived and moved as in a cloud

That never melts into the sun:—

Sly—always—even slily laughed!

He won the birthright—little won!
For life he had to flee away;
And then, on coming back, he bowed
To me, to me, by terror cowed
Like very slave. I pity felt;
My anger did in mercy melt.
One blood is in us—so I ran
And kissed the brother in the man;
And knew how greatly 'tis to live
When one can a great wrong forgive!

What have I lost? A Prince am I;
An army mine: a kingdom grows
Around my sword from day to day:
The Horites flee before my face;
I have my pleasure in the chase,
A-hunting beasts, a-hunting men,
From out Seir's highest cave and den.
Let Jacob be a priest—not I.
A prophet, pilgrim, what he will.
I live my life beneath the sky.

48 ESAU AT THE CAVE OF MACHPELAH.

Enough for me the hour that flows Around: be his the far-away; Be his the dream of worlds to be— This busy earth's enough for me,

I hunger—sorrow will not quell Its cry, and lay its pangs to sleep.

There! What a grand gazelle!—gazelle. That I will after, and will kill; For we must work as well as weep.

EZRA.

THE Holy Scriptures were destroyed, Each scroll in sacrilegious fire, By Chaldean pagan hands condemned Into one awful pyre.

Sad Ezra sat beneath an oak.

From withered bush before him came
Commanding Voice, and not of earth,
That called him by his name.

'Depart,' it said, 'for forty days

To field afar from homes of men,

And with thee scribes who know to use

A rapid-writing pen.'

He went—five with him. To him beamed Adown Morn's earliest rays a cup Of water, blushing like a rose; He drank the water up. Immmediate wisdom in him grew!

All-luminous the past unrolls;

He sees with cloudless eye each word

Of all the vanished scrolls.

For forty days and nights he told

Line after line, nor paused a pen

Till the great task was done,—restored

Thus God's own Book to men.

Bless'd they, from age to age, the truth
In this grey legend that unfold,
Who with the pen of daily life
Re-write the Scriptures old.

MALACHI.

Only a voice! Unseen,
Thou'rt heard clear-speaking in far Hebrew day,
Bidding fall'n Israel in fond accents keen
Repent—obey!

The messenger of God

To rulers, priests, and people, with reproof

And promise, with the olive-bough and rod,

For their behoof.

Reformer! Friend, perchance,
Of Nehemiah, city-builder: sure
Didst thou build men, 'mid hind'ring circumstance,
In manhood pure.

Seal of the Prophets! Last
Of the Heaven-burthened, Heaven-directed line,
Foretelling glories (now long ages past)
And woes condign.

MALACHI.

Thou star of ling'ring night,
Skirting the dawn—at length to melt away,
Joyful, into the universal light
Of Christian day !

ė,

NAZARETH.

LOOK from these emerald heights, the breath
Of the far ocean o'er thy brow,
On the long-fameless town below,
He made thee famous, Nazareth!

Enough for thee that He, a child,

Took His first steps upon thy streets,

Where crossway small with crossway meets,

While Mother Mary to Him smiled.

Enough that, busy boy and man,
In shop with ever-open door
Through which the only light could pour,
In thee He toiled an artisan.

Enough that to thy house of prayer

It was His Sabbath wont to go,

And at thy fountain gay to show

Serener face than any there.

Enough that from these crowning heights

He Carmel, Gilboa, Tabor saw—

Scenes echoing with the solemn law—

Scenes lit with History's thousand lights.

Thy stony streets, thy hills of green,

He knew,—this gives thee all thy fame:

This that He, grown to man, became

The everlasting Nazarene!

THE LAKE OF GENNESARET.

LAKE, mirror once of walnut, palm,
Fig, oleander glowing bright,
With many a scattered cottage white
Clear-pictured in thy waters calm;

Brown fishing-boats upon thy breast, And patient pelicans for prey Haunting thy shore, while azure day Rejoiced to see herself at rest

In thy translucent depths. But now The busy life from thee has passed, No net into thy waves is cast, No tree is garland to thy brow.

The curse of Islam, like hell-flame,
All round thee, Lake, has scorched and scarred;
But thou art still the Master's bard,
And all thy voices breathe His name.

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JOHN RICHARD GREEN.

How many read a book, nor think That life-blood mingled with the ink.

His was such sacred ink who—past—Is death-revealed to all at last.

What battle his against disease; What victory o'er the love of ease!

What labour wrought 'mid failing breath, And 'neath the heavy wings of Death!

A patriot true, he loved to trace The story of our English race.

With knowledge—ready guide—to lead Back to our glories in the seed;

To point the slowly-widening way By which our fame has reached to-day.

Much more he could have writ! But then He had himself been less to men.

He died—and now all men can see How great a book a man may be!



THE WEAVER OF PEACE.

WEAVER of peace! a pleasant phrase For women in old Saxon days, Telling of work more beautiful Than any in the flax or wool.

And still, with gentle heart, and word In which the gentle heart is heard, She weaves, though ages since have run The various-minded house in one.

The cares of others all her own She makes, forgetting self alone; Their joy is hers, with them she grieves, And thus all hearts together weaves.

Blest home that knows her silent skill, The ageing husband lover still, The children kindred more than birth Can make them—home the heaven of earth. O happy she! and happy they
For whom she labours day by day,
Weaving, as only woman can,
Peace in the loom of love for man.

HÂNA AND BÂNA.

' Bein Hâna wa Bâna Râh Lahâna.'

Arab Proverb.

Two wives an Arab chieftain had— The worse for him! and they Were, ruled by different fancies, sad About his beard of grey.

The one would have it wholly black,
The other wholly white;
Each saw in it a grievous lack,
And each would set it right.

The youthful Bâna wished her lord To show a younger face; While Hâna, blest with age, adored A venerable grace.

So one plucked out the hairs of black, And one the hairs of grey, 'Till sat he in disgraceful lack, His beard all plucked away. And hence the Arab proverb sprung
From that poor chief bereft,
"Tween Hâna old and Bâna young
None of our beard is left."

It came and went and came; then died Into a nobler chime.

I knew (my heart declared) those bells
Were from some other clime:

Glad bells by angels pealed! in realms
Beyond these realms of Time!

ST. CUTHBERT'S WAY.

THE holy Cuthbert in his boat was sailing

· Along the coast of Fife.

A furious tempest rose: his comrades, quailing, Were trembling for their life.

The blinding snow-storm, dazzling eye, and chilling To uselessness each hand,
Drove the poor crew (the boat with water filling)
To the mist-shrouded land.

In their distress they murmured to each other,
'No way the dark sea o'er;
And every road the dreadful snow-drifts smother
Along or from the shore.'

'There's still the way of heaven!' good Cuthbert, cheerful, In highest wisdom wise,

ST. CUTHBERT'S WAY.

Answered his storm-drenched comrades, sad and fearful;

' That ever open lies!'

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Ay, that is always open, though all others
May closed against us be;
Saint Cuthbert's way of old, and, baffled brothers!
The way for you and me!

THE END.

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